

Marin Sonoma Narrows Policy Advisory Group

Meeting Summary from March 16, 2005

The meeting was held at the Petaluma Community Center I and was called to order at 3:35pm.

PAG members in attendance were Chair Cynthia Murray, Vice Chair David Glass, Mike Healy, Bernard Meyers, Bob Blanchard, Jeanne MacLeamy, and Peter Breen. Excused members were Pat Eklund, Mike Kerns, Tim Smith, and Steve Kinsey.

Key Staff members attending included Suzanne Wilford, Craig Tackabery, Melissa Hundley-Gibson, Art Brook, and Lisa Klein.

Agenda item 1. SCTA request to program SHOPP project for Petaluma River Bridge

Suzanne Wilford related the focus on safety detailed in the SHOPP request, and indicated that the SCTA is looking for partners in funding this effort. Petaluma Councilman Healy spoke on his research of safety deficiencies of the bridge over the past 20 years relating to (a) the lack of shoulders and (b) vertical sightline deficiency. Mr. Healy proposed a phased improvement that would address “particular discreet” elements that can be addressed with SHOPP funding. Ms. Wilford described five action items needed to include this project in 2006 SHOPP funding. PAG voted unanimously (Breen abstaining due to late arrival at meeting) to support sending a letter requesting the SHOPP funding to Caltrans in support for the SCTA letter.

Agenda item 3. Discussion of HOT lane element (taken out of agenda order)

Project Manager Ray Akkawi presented a slide show describing project, PSRs, four alternatives being studied, and previous and current status of HOT lane engineering and fund generation. (See presentation for details.)

Chair Murray stated that the PAG desire to review and analyze HOT lane inclusion in the MSN project was driven by funding questions, and that the 2000 MTC study (referenced in presentation) showed the HOT lane revenue would not be adequate to fully fund construction and operations. Mr. Breen asked if the amount of the toll charged would impact the financial assumptions in the MTC study. Lisa Klein of MTC stated that the study shows congestion relief is similar with use of either HOT or HOV lane. PM Akkawi indicated that a key reason Caltrans did not pursue the HOT lane was the MTC study’s conclusions on corridor performance and the 138’ wide footprint necessary. Nonetheless, HOT lane remained as an alternative for MSN. Today HOT lanes are in use in Southern California and being considered in Alameda and Santa Clara counties. In addition, the Governor’s Go California program is an effort to encourage private toll roads. Chair Murray asked if carpools would travel for free in HOT lane proposed for I-680. Lisa Klein answered yes, for vehicles with 2 or more persons. PM Akkawi discussed the need to address conditions that have changed since MTC study, such as higher bridge tolls and impacts on flow. PM Akkawi reviewed the footprint of HOT lane proposed for 680 (122’ footprint plus 24’ added width at entry and exit points, with transitional lanes of approximately .5 mile. Chair Murray took a question from the public (Joy Dahlgren) proposing the need to quantify delays in the corridor and differences in flow between allowing 2 persons or 3 persons to travel free in the HOV lane. A second public question (Don Wilhelm) requested information on the cost per mile to maintain freeway. Question

was referred by the Chair to PM Akkawi. Mr. Wilhelm asked if electric transducers would be used to collect tolls in proposed HOT lanes, to which PM Akkawi answered yes. Mr. Wilhelm stated that Southern California uses no transition lanes, and asked if Caltrans requirements are being tightened to make HOV/HOT lanes infeasible. PM Akkawi replied that there are no established standards and that HOT lanes have been constructed as pilot projects and transition lanes are seen as necessary for safety. MTC and CT District 4 are attempting to determine the proper configuration and footprint where HOT lanes are concerned. Regarding the question on 2 v 3 required in HOV lane, Akkawi said future projections indicate there is no excess capacity at a 2 person HOV level between Petaluma and Santa Rosa. Mr. Healy asked what width is studied in the environmental document for the footprint in the narrows. PM Akkawi replied the width is 114' for HOV or HOT – the same width as in earlier studies. Mr. Healy asked if the environmental work already done is adequate for any new width proposed. Mr. Akkawi and Chair Murray indicated that an increased width would require new environmental study and acquisition of more ROW. Mr. Healy asked how additional studies and ROW would impact schedule. PM Akkawi it would take an additional 2 years plus ROW acquisition time. Mr. Healy asked for a cost difference between HOV and HOT in segments A and B. PM Akkawi stated the increase would be 10% plus delays, mitigations, and ROW, for a total of \$40 to \$50 million additional. Mr. Breen inquired as to why the PAG was looking into the HOT lane possibility. Chair Murray indicated the main reason is to review if it would generate additional construction funding. Mr. Blanchard stated that he could not see any pros for inclusion of HOT lane. Mr. Glass stated that he cannot support HOT lane in MSN unless HOT lane was included from the top of Sonoma County to the Golden Gate Bridge. Chair Murray asks for and receives PAG agreement not to pursue HOT lanes in the MSN environmental document now but to reserve HOT lanes as a consideration for the full corridor as a future pursuit for study.

Agenda item 2. Construction phasing

PM Akkawi showed slides on projected construction costs for 3 segments (segment A cost = \$63.7 million, segment B cost = \$172.8 million, segment C cost = \$76 million.) Chair Murray asked “how much do we have to play with?” to which PM Akkawi replied \$16-17 million (referred to as the Woolsey earmark). Ms. Wilford mentioned the additional Measure M money available as \$35 million. PM Akkawi indicated the cost of ROW would be \$90 million. Ms. MacLeamy asked which segments make the most sense, i.e., the most logical place to start. A group discussion over phasing ensued, with a number of questions on Caltrans criteria for sequence of construction on sub segments within segments A, B and C. Chair Murray asked if there is any money for MSN defined, other than that mentioned. Ms. Wilford indicated that funding sources are problematic; STIP money “may go negative” in the short term. Chair Murray stated that present efforts should focus on safety issues due to uncertainty of consistent funding. Mr. Healy asked when the SHOPP contribution would be known, to which Ms. Wilford replied one year. Chair Murray asked what other safety improvements can be identified. PM Akkawi stated that segment B has the most safety concerns. Chair Murray asked if Caltrans wants PAG recommendations on construction phasing. PM Akkawi indicated that recommendations were not being solicited at this time and the item was offered as information for the PAG.

Chair Murray asked if southbound AM and northbound PM peaks were considered in phasing. PM Akkawi stated that “operationally it makes sense” but is not feasible or economical to construct in a manner to address those peaks. Mr. Glass asked if “danger points” will only be relocated by widening only portions of the narrows. Mr. Akkawi agreed that this could be the result but will be carefully analyzed to minimize.. Mr. Meyers referred to earlier discussions of safety issues on Petaluma River Bridge, and suggested that it could be useful to prioritize widening highway portions where there are no interchanges involved. Mr. Blanchard indicated that a focus on safety is appropriate and Caltrans should present construction phasing in terms of safety considerations rather than congestion relief. Chair Murray expressed concern that the traveling public may not appreciate safety improvements if congestion is not addressed. Mr. Healy asked if CT can anticipate budget impact if Prop. 42 is fire walled by the voters. Ms. Wilford and Mr. Tackabery stated that any fire walling is not likely to happen in the 2005-06 budget year, and if it does occur it will be backfilled. Mr. Tackabery also stated we want to develop a strategy that maximizes use of local funds, which include RTIP, federal earmarks and Measure M, with Caltrans ITIP funds. Mrs. MacLeamy stated that cost estimates need to show ROW cost escalation. Chair Murray asked when ROW can be acquired. Mr. Tackabery answered ROW can be acquired when EIR is final. Ms. Wilford stated that it may be wise to apply funding as it becomes available to ROW purchase to avoid future increases in ROW cost. Mr. (Don Wilhelm) of the public asks if EIR shows cost element of roadway widening in the median only. PM Akkawi answered no; in segment B there is a need to shift alignment to correct horizontal curve and vertical profile problems. Widening in segments A and C is planned in median only. Chair Murray asked if Caltrans needs any PAG action on this item, to which PM Akkawi said no.

Agenda item 4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next PAG meeting

Ms. Wilford pointed out that SMART meetings will be getting longer and suggested PAG meetings be set for a later start time. Chair Murray agreed and set the future meeting time as 3:30pm. The next scheduled PAG meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2005, at the Novato City Hall.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:50pm.